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IDIS 376: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE

Summarization of Chapter One, *Am I Black Enough for You?*

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The opening chapter of *Am I Black Enough for You?* seemed most intriguing at first. As if the book's title did not grab attention enough, the first chapter immediately dove into serious societal issues immediately. Boyd's main focus in this chapter deals mostly with changes in views within black culture since the early twentieth century. He talks about Booker T. Washington, civil rights era ideas, war-time views, and more modern attitudes. He attributes these changes in culture to gradual generational change. His metamorphosis begins with Washington's idea of the Race Man and continues through to the declining appeal of individual achieves such as Cosby, Spike Lee and his New Black Aesthetic (NBA), and finishes with the most modern concept of the nigga.

After presenting a preceding synopsis of the chapter to follow Boyd defines the Race Man in the words of Booker T. Washington as a man who bears the task of "uplifting the race." His immediate example is Bill Cosby. Once he has offered an adequate characterization of the Race Man he immediately begins to show his flaws. The Race Man rooted his success in popular white society. This was definitely assimilationism but was not condemned at the time by others since it was taken for granted that African Americans received no credit anyway. Boyd states later that both world wars were expected to ease the racial tension in the states. Once it became evident that this was a fading hope, the civil rights movement began with more flare two decades after WWII. These were the children of those who were adults during the war. The Race Man's major flaw was that people such as Cosby and Oprah represented success on an individual level achieved through popular entertainment and did not truly "uplift the race."

Boyd continues the transition by describing the downfall of Cosby as a racial icon. Instead of using the entertainment success to deal with true racial issues, Cosby focused on the most positive images of a middle-class black family imaginable. In the words of Herman Gray, Race

Man images like Cosby faded because they showed individuals who were "just Black enough not to offend and middle class enough to comfort." This caused eventual disbelief in both whites and blacks. By the time Cosby retired from the show in 1986, representations of black individuals and families in the entertainment industry were not so restricted. He credits part of this to Spike Lee.

The NBA is defined by Trey Ellis and best exemplified by Spike Lee according to Boyd. The main focus concerns reformation of "both race and class line." In Spike Lee's films, which were first somewhat alarming with black nationalism, a new black vision is clearly illustrated. The differences from the generations before are evident. Lee is more capable as a filmmaker in contemporary society to address racial issues and seizes the opportunities. However, Boyd discusses Lee's own struggles in making films such as *Malcolm X*. Boyd gives Lee his due credit for achievements in the filmmaking industry and for paving the way for other black filmmakers. However, he condemns him for using the image of Malcolm X in his film to draw comparisons to Oliver Stone in order to gain white acceptance. He reinforces this idea with other examples of "selling out."

The final section of chapter one deals with the concept of the nigga. Boyd says that the word now denotes class more readily than race. The word serves as more of an identity to the ghetto. Barkley's words denouncing his place as a role model are used to exemplify the nigga persona. The nigga is a person who sees only the value of the education offered in the streets. These are the "truly disadvantaged" who seem beyond outside help, locked in their situations. Boyd talks about the "rap game" as a way out of the ghetto. Later he draws similarities between Mike Tyson, OJ Simpson, Clarence Thomas, Snoop, and Tupac with regards to incessant sexual prowess drawn from a previous disadvantaged existence. He concludes by reinforcing the idea that the main problem is dissociation with race once a higher class level has been achieved.